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Remarks

This Amendment is intended to be fully responsive to the Office Action mailed April 27, 2006. Claims 1-20 are pending in this application. Claim 20 is allowed, and dependent claims 4-6, 9, and 17 are objected to as being dependent on a rejected base claim. Claim 7 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite; claims 1-3, 7, 8, and 10-16 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Igawa et al. (U.S. 6,688,637). Claim 18 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Igawa et al. in view of Iuchi et al. (U.S. 4,800,775). Claim 19 is rejected under §103(a) as being unpatentable over Igawa et al. in view of Ross (U.S. 6,250,666).

Claims 1, 5, 6, 8-14, 18 and 19 are currently amended. Dependent claim 17, which the Examiner indicated includes allowable subject matter, has been rewritten into claim 14 along with dependent claims 15 and 16. Dependent claims 15, 16, and 17 are cancelled herein.

Objection to the Drawings:

The Examiner objects to the drawings under 37 C.F.R. 1.83(a), stating: “[T]he method of molding or casting the armature and the structural portion with an upper tool and lower tool, and without a slide must be shown or the feature(s) canceled from the claim(s).” This objection relates to dependent claims 12, 13, 18, and 19, each of which is currently amended herein to remove the features from the claims that do not appear in the drawings. Therefore, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider his objection in light of this amendment.

Claim Rejections - §112, Second Paragraph:

Claim 7

The Examiner rejects claim 7 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. Specifically, the Examiner cites the limitation “said at least one engagement portion” (line 3) as having insufficient antecedent basis. Claim 1 is amended herein to include an “engagement portion”. Support for the amendment is found at paragraph

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[0018], line 10. Accordingly, amended claim 7 has sufficient antecedent basis, and the §112 rejection of this claim is believed to be overcome.

Claim Rejections - §102:

Claims 1-3, 7, 8, and 10-16

Claims 1-3, 7, 8, and 10-16 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Igawa et al. (U.S. 6,688,637 B2). For a rejection to be proper under 35 U.S.C. §102, every element and limitation found in the rejected claim must be found in the reference. MPEP §2131. “A claim is anticipated only if each and every element as set forth in the claim is found, either expressly or inherently described, in a single prior art reference.” Verdegaal Bros. v. Union Oil Co. of California, 814 F.2d 628, 631, 2 USPQ2d 1051, 1053 (Fed. Cir. 1987). (emphasis added).

Claim 1

The Examiner states, “Igawa et al. discloses...an airbag module retention system (Figure 6) including at least one foot (35) and at least one spring (34), wherein the spring is sufficiently configured to retain the foot in a snap-fit engagement (plate 8b retains hook 35b in snap-fit engagement) thereby to fasten the airbag module to the armature (Figure 6).”

The spring 34 of Figure 6 of Igawa et al. is part of an alternate horn switch and not part of an airbag module retention system as required by claim 1. (See Igawa et al., column 5, lines 22-23). Additionally, as previously described herein, claim 1 is amended to further recite “an engagement portion” of the spring “sufficiently configured to retain (a) foot in a snap-fit engagement thereby to fasten the air bag module to the armature.” Spring (34) of Igawa et al. does not have “an engagement portion...sufficiently configured to retain (a) foot in a snap-fit engagement thereby to fasten the air bag module to the armature.” Igawa’s spring is configured only to bias. (See Figure 6). Projecting pieces 35-35b on Igawa’s module cover 5B retain the module cover to the horn switch support 8b. Further, citing Igawa et al.: “From steering wheel 10, a bracket 11 protrudes upward...and base portions 8a...and projecting pieces 9 ...are fixed to the bracket with bolts 12.” (column 4, lines 7-11). Therefore, since the Igawa spring (34) does not have at least one “engagement portion sufficiently configured to retain (a) foot in a snap-fit

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arrangement thereby to fasten the airbag module to the armature" (emphasis added), claim 1 is not anticipated by Igawa et al. In other words, Igawa's projecting pieces (35), and not the spring (34), are attached to and hold in place module cover 5B, as shown in Figure 6. The bolts 12 connect the rest of the assembly as previously stated herein. As the spring does not do so, and as only the cover 5B is so attached and not the airbag module as a whole. Accordingly, all of the elements set forth in claim 1 are not found and amended claim 1 is properly allowable.

Claims 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10-14

Claims 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10-14 ultimately depend from amended claim 1, and are therefore allowable for at least the same reasons as amended claim 1. Additionally:

Claim 8: The Examiner states "the airbag module is configured for snap-fit engagement with the spring...prior to assembly...hook 35b is formed on the projections 35 before assembling airbag cover 5B to the armature 10." (emphasis added). However, hook 35b of Igawa et al. is clearly part of projecting piece 35 and not part of the spring 34. See Figure 7. Claim 8 requires "snap-fit engagement (of one of the air bag module and armature) with said at least one spring". (emphasis added). Therefore, neither the airbag module nor the armature of Igawa et al. is "configured for snap-fit engagement" with Igawa et al.'s spring as required by claim 8. For this additional reason, Igawa et al. does not anticipate claim 8, which is properly allowable. Additionally, the inadvertently included term "element" is removed from the term "spring element" for consistency with the antecedent basis found in claim 1.

Claim 11: For clarification, amended claim 11 recites "a travel stop to restrict inward movement of said air bag module to thereby limit the force that may be applied to said switch." Support is found at paragraph [0024], lines 7-11. The Examiner states regarding Igawa et al.: "a travel stop (lower edge of plate 31 in Figure 6) restricts inward movement of the airbag module." However, the force applied to switch 33 by switch plate 31 in Figure 6 of Igawa et al. is not limited by that switch plate. Accordingly, claim 11 is properly allowable.

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Claims 14-16: With regard to independent method claim 14 and dependent claims 15 and 16, the Examiners states "the structure of the steering wheel assembly of Igawa et al. meets the method limitations." The Examiner indicates there is allowable subject matter in method claim 17. Accordingly, claim 14 is amended herein to include the limitations of dependent claims 15-17, and claims 15-17 are cancelled herein, and amended claim 14 is properly allowable.

Claims 15-16 depend from claim 14, and are allowable for at least the same reasons as claim 14 is allowable.

Claim Rejections - §103(a): Claims 18 and 19.

Claim 18 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Igawa et al. in view of Iuchi et al. (U.S. 4,800,775). The Examiner states, "Igawa et al. discloses the claimed invention...but does not disclose a method of molding the armature with an upper tool and a lower tool, and without a slide. Iuchi et al., however, does...".

To establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness, three basic criteria must be met. First, there must be some suggestion or motivation, either in the references themselves or in the knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art, to modify the reference or to combine reference teachings. Second, there must be a reasonable expectation of success. Finally, the prior art reference (or references when combined) must teach or suggest all the claim limitations. (emphasis added).

Claim 18 depends from amended claim 14, which is as previously discussed herein above is currently amended per the Examiner's indication of allowable subject matter in claim 17 to include the limitations of claims 15-17. Igawa et al. therefore does not disclose the claimed invention as recited in amended claim 14, the limitations of which are also not taught or suggested by the steering wheel invention of Iuchi et al. Also, claim 18 is amended herein to remove the unshown upper tool, lower tool, and slide features to overcome the Examiner's drawings objection, also as previously described hereinabove. Claim 18 therefore is properly allowable.

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Claim 19 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Igawa et al. in view of Ross (U.S. 6,250,666). The Examiner states, “Igawa et al. discloses the claimed invention...but does not disclose a method of molding the armature with an upper tool and a lower tool, and without a slide. Ross, however, does...”. As with claim 18 discussed above, claim 19 also depends from amended claim 14, and is allowable for at least the same reasons as claim 14. Additionally, claim 19 is amended herein to remove the unshown upper tool, lower tool, and slide features to overcome the Examiner’s drawings objection, also as previously described hereinabove. For these reasons, claim 19 is properly allowable.

Claim Objections: Claims 4-6, 9, and 17

The Examiner states, “claims 4-6, 9, and 17 are objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.”

Claims 4, 5, 6, and 9 ultimately depend from amended claim 1, previously discussed hereinabove, and are allowable for at least the same reasons as amended claim 1 is allowable. Also, the Examiner has indicated that claims 4-6 and 9 define allowable subject matter. Claims 4, 5, 6, and 9 should be allowable for this further reason. Additionally, claim 6 is amended herein to remove the inadvertently included term “element” from the term “spring element” to provide consistency with the antecedent basis found in claim 1.

Claim 17 depends from claim 14, which as previously discussed, is amended herein to include all of the limitations of dependent claims 15-17, as suggested by the Examiner. Accordingly, amended claim 17 is now properly allowable.

Allowable Subject Matter

Claim 20

Applicant notes with appreciation the Examiner’s allowance of claim 20.

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Please charge any fees that may be due to Deposit Account No. 07-0960.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura C. Hargitt

Laura C. Hargitt - Attorney
Reg. No. 43,989
Telephone: 313-665-4710